

WSIS PrepCom-3

Opening Speech

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the last Preparatory Committee meeting of WSIS. It is, arguably, the most significant meeting in the momentous history of WSIS.

I have just returned from the Summit in New York where world leaders discussed the achievement of the millennium development goals and the future of the UN. I had the privilege to participate in one of the Round Tables, among Heads of State and Government.

At the round table, I emphasized the benefits and opportunities that ICTs will offer in achieving the millennium development goals. I argued that, during an earlier stage of human development, we passed from an agricultural economy to an industrial one. But if we have to wait for all countries to pass through the same process of development, I fear the developing world would never close the gap. That is why ICTs are so important: because they can help countries to leapfrog this development process, by moving directly to an information-based society, if they take the proper steps.

Although ICTs are not a panacea for the world's long-standing problems of development and international tension, they can nevertheless help address many of the needs and global challenges of the 21st century. ICTs can provide a powerful tool for the benefit of all citizens and for the UN in the achievement of the millennium development goals.

However, the draft outcome document devoted only one sentence to the role of ICTs out of 35 pages. World leaders must pay more attention to ICTs.

After the round table, some Heads of State came to me and confirmed that they agreed fully with my views and promised that they would come to Tunis to discuss the issues. I was very encouraged by this.

I also attended the breakfast meeting organised by the voluntary Digital Solidarity Fund. At that meeting, the president of Senegal explained in detail how telemedicine is changing the life of people in Senegal and why ICTs are so important. The President of the Dominican Republic explained why he is supporting the Digital Solidarity Fund and working hard to get the full support of Latin America and Caribbean countries for it. He argued that ICTs can help developing countries like his to progress directly to a knowledge-based society.

While diplomats and bureaucrats are trapped by the inertia of tradition, and could only give one sentence to ICTs in the outcome document, the world leaders have recognised the importance of the ICTs and are already acting far ahead of diplomats and bureaucrats in recognising the role of ICTs for development.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The Tunis phase is the Summit of Solutions. It aims at transforming the digital divide into digital opportunities for promoting peace, sustainable development, democracy, transparency and good governance.

It aims at empowering people through access to knowledge and information for promoting development.

And it aims to give a voice to all, especially the weak and vulnerable who have been silent for too long.

As we now head towards Tunis in less than two months' time, we must make every effort to achieve a farsighted and dynamic draft outcome that will be worthy of agreement by world leaders.

Everything is now up to you: will you will be trapped by tradition and narrow interests, or will you be creative enough to deliver a concrete, clear road map for the future?

The Group of Friends of the Chair has worked hard to produce a text that could be used as a starting point for our work.

I wonder what world leaders would say if they saw this paper. If no further enrichment were made in this preparatory committee, would they still be willing to spare the time to come to Tunis to endorse the proposals?

Your work here in Geneva over the next two weeks is critical. We should not be constrained by bureaucracy. We should be proud of the unique and privileged position we have in preparing a roadmap to a more equitable and just information society, which no one in the past could ever achieve.

The task of building the Information Society is not about technology.

It is about people. And it is about helping them in achieving their social, cultural and economic aspirations.

It is about eradicating poverty and improving livelihoods.

It is about conserving the environment, improving health care and increasing the food supply.

It is about preventing child mortality, and increasing the capacities of every child that we raise.

And, it is about forging partnerships with all those who have a stake in improving the legacy we will leave to our future generations.

The future requires us to rise above narrow concerns.

The success of the “Summit of Solutions” rests in your very capable hands. Let’s create a concrete implementation mechanism for the action plan of Geneva. Let’s find a way forward for Internet Governance, based on a multi-stakeholder process that is multilateral, transparent and democratic.

The success of the Summit of Solutions rests in the hands of all stakeholders; whether we can commit to build a just and equitable information society.

In keeping with this goal, ITU has launched the Connect the World initiative, a partnership that brings together the most innovative minds and resources and includes experts from governments, business, civil society and international organizations. They have brought to the table their commitment to use technology and resources to help people communicate, foster the flow of information and knowledge and accelerate the pace of development.

They are ready to take action.

Now is time for you, Prepcom 3 to make a big step forward.

I am looking forward to working with you in the spirit of goodwill and understanding that has always marked the WSIS process.

Thank you.